A Field Guide for Neurotypicals

Yeah, I said it — This Autistic Is Done With Playing Nice If you're not familiar with the Age of Scorpius drama, let's just say it's epic. I'm not going to recap it, b...

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Yeah, I said it — This Autistic Is Done With Playing Nice

If you're not familiar with the *Age of Scorpius* drama, let's just say it's epic. I'm not going to recap it, but there's plenty of information if you just look it up via the search engine of your choice. Or watch Meredith Novaco's video on it, which is an excellent dissection of the entire saga, or at least up until a month ago.

This blog post by Jesse Brown is also another excellent resource with external links if you want to catch up.

Briefly: Winter is a 22 year-old American indie author, who has been the center of a firestorm since the end of July for 1) apparently overpromising on the quality of their debut novel to thousands of buyers, 2) displaying questionable behavior when criticized for it, 3) displaying further questionable behavior in an attempt to course correct.

I shamelessly admit I like drama, as long as I'm not in the middle of it. I like drama as an opportunity to observe psychology, maladaptive coping strategies, unreliable narratives, audience behavior, and emotional implosions. I observe it the same way a primatologist might observe a bunch of chimpanzees fighting over the last piece of fruit.

I've restrained myself from commenting on *Age of Scorpius*, because Winter is an indie author and as an indie author I hold myself to the strict rule of *Don't Punch Down On Other Indies*.

I stuck to this even when I watched Winter punch down on another indie author, and other authors punched down on her. I kept my mouth shut even when Winter decided to flee the United States for Finland (???). And I want to think I'm still not punching down here, as I'm not addressing the quality or alleged lack thereof in Winter's writing. But I am absolutely punching sideways. Because, after all these months,

Winter has finally done something to hit my breaking point.

I'm just going to refer to Winter as "Winter" here, out of respect for not using his AFAB/deadname, because during the course of this epic drama, Winter has come out as FtM transgender, with the given name of "Milo." But I'm just going to refer to him as "Winter" in this essay to avoid potential reader confusion over his pre- and post-FtM identities.

Anyhow, as I've observed Winter over the last several months, one of the things he frequently claims is that he is on the autistic spectrum, and when his writing style or behavior is criticized, he defaults to using ASD as a shield. And, I admit, part of the reason I went easy on him at first was because of the ASD claim. Autistics shouldn't punch down on autistics either.

But, thanks to my autistic pattern recognition, my ASD spidey senses started picking up on certain things in Winter's behavior that were not adding up. I progressed from puzzlement, to annoyance and finally, to outrage. The record must be corrected.

TOO LATE

(Did you see what I just did there? This is how some ASDs process: hold to a strict ethical line even when socially inconvenient until a contradiction presents itself. The contradiction becomes kryptonite to ASD cognition. Then war is declared on the contradiction with the compulsion and intent to correct the record. Incidentally, this is probably why I like Napoleonic history so much, because after a certain point it stops making sense, and my neurotype refuses to accept it.)

What I'm going to do is discuss Winter's claims of being autistic and investigating them. Inevitably, someone will conflate investigation with gatekeeping. I do not consider it gatekeeping if it can be demonstrated if the behavior displayed by the individual is actively harmful to the community they claim to be part of.

This behavior is something I see a lot online, where an indivdual claims ASD, but their behavior reads as … off.

I also want to clarify I am not a professional diagnostician nor do I have certification in psychology. However, my real-world career sometimes ends up crossing paths with people experiencing mental health crises. Also, I have studied human psychology over a number of years to understand my own neurodivergent cognition. When you put those two above things together along with ASD pattern recognition, well, it's not something I can just turn off and on.

It is true that not all autistics express their neurodivergence in the same ways. There is no one size fits all. It is, after all a spectrum. And a spectrum means there are traits in common. Have this excellent video from Auticate with Chris & Debbie on YouTube. Not every ASD will have all of these traits, but when enough of them present themselves in one person, congrats, they're very probably autistic.

Alright, now that's out of the way, let's focus on Winter.

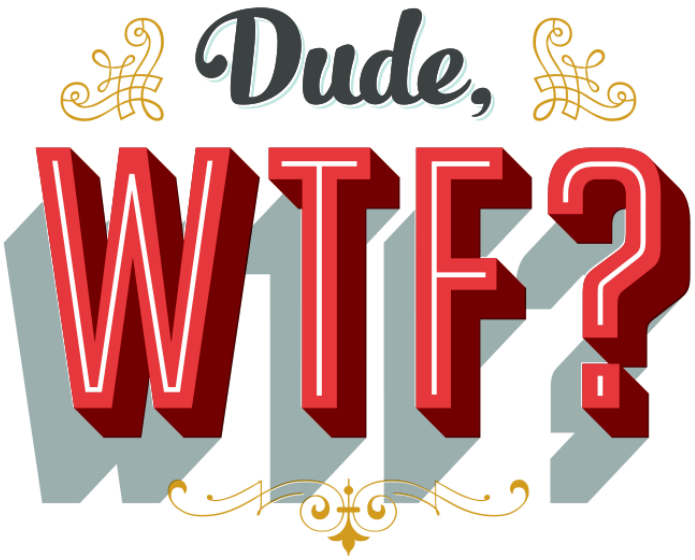
Giving Winter's book, *Age of Scorpius*, an unsolicited line and developmental edit (as a number of book vloggers and bloggers — some of whom are indie authors — have done) is, imo, cringe. *Indies should not punch down on other indies.* Leave the edits to the editors.

I do not think the writing style of Winter's book is indicative of autism/no autism, although I do think it shows the style of someone who has confined himself

to the hothouse of his own prose and has not read widely. Not having read a wide variety of books and authors when one is 22 years-old is actually completely understandable. At 22, I was very well-read in *Star Trek* tie-in novels and not a whole lot else.

Where Winter started going of the rails for me was this escalating claim:

- “I spend three hours a day writing.”
- “I’m on the phone with my editor for three hours every night.”
- “I have multi-hour meetings with my team every day.”



First, your editor is not your therapist, and I think even most therapists would draw the line at three-hour daily calls.

Secondly, this is a biological and temporal impossibility.

Winter made these claims when defending himself against criticism for the quality of his book in an attempt to show that he is serious about his work. ASD was deployed as his reasoning for the quality of his work.

Let's slot that into what we already know of Winters' daily schedule:

- Three hours of writing
- Three hours on the phone with the editor
- Multi-hour team meetings
- Managing an online presence
- Reading fan feedback
- Rewriting a 112K word book chapter by chapter
- Allegedly running a 20-person team consisting of illustrators and musicians (???)
- Basic bodily needs including eating and sleeping.

Can an ASD react the way Winter did here? Can an ASD make exaggerated claims as a form of psychological cushioning and self-defense? Yes, it's not implausible, and is often deployed in an impulsive moment of crisis. However, one of the traits of ASD is reflexive and blunt honesty (seen in Auticate's video at #8), not multiple elaborate exaggerations over an extended period of time.

Even if Winter's alleged daily schedule is real, an ASD is probably not going to deal well with that sort of required time management without experiencing a meltdown and burnout. We are generally shit at managing our time.

Another thing that pinged off my ASD radar about Winter's neurotype was his claim of six thousand books

being personally delivered to his residence in advance to mail out to his supporters. Physical copies of his book clearly did exist, as unboxing videos and videos discussing the book have demonstrated.

However …

Six thousand books is not a small number. *Age of Scorpius* was not a small book at 112K words. Since it's not a small book, let's be generous and say that's twenty books per box. ***That's still 300 boxes delivered to Winter's apartment.***

There would have been pallets of books. Liftgates. Signatures required. This is not "UPS dropping off a box on your doorstep" — this requires a Maesrk-level logistics company. A freight delivery company would have taken pictures for their own documentation and liability. A terminally online 22 year-old would have posted brag photos to their social media accounts. In a residential apartment block, neighbors would have definitely noticed, and nothing goes undocumented in the internet panopticon of the mid-2020s.

Look, I analyzed the supply chain for Napoleon's 1812 Russian campaign. For fun. It shows, yeah? It's the same thing as it was in 1812: when the math doesn't cooperate, it doesn't cooperate. Two plus two cannot be coaxed, threatened, or bartered into equaling five.

(Yes, of course I invoked French history. This would not be an Anatole post if it did not.)

You think 6000 books is bad? Try marching 700,000 men from Poland to Moscow with nothing but your ego and the hope the Russian serfs you meet on the way will be understanding.

While I can't find it, I vaguely remember Winter mentioning the books were printed and shipped from China (where mass printing is cheaper than the domestic US).

This would entail:

- A full or shared **shipping container** (20ft or 40ft depending on paper weight).
- A freight forwarder coordinating port logistics.
- Bill of lading.
- Port unloading.
- Customs clearance.
- Domestic LTL palletized freight.
- A drayage carrier to move the container off-port.
- A palletized handoff to regional freight.
- A scheduled delivery window—*which residential addresses often cannot even accept* without prior arrangement.

- A truck physically capable of liftgate offload at a residence.
- Multiple pallets shrink-wrapped to OSHA standards
- The **amount of trash generated by prepping the books for delivery would have overwhelmed apartment dumpsters** and would probably require coordination with municipal trash pick-up for bulk removal.

A container ship is not a subtle flex.

If Winter is the naturalist and environmentalist he claims to be, where is his decrying about being a catastrophic one-man source of six-thousand waste units generated to fulfill his dream of publishing a book? ASDs are usually (but not always) pushed towards reckoning honestly with this contradiction in ethics as claimed versus ethics as practiced.

An allistic neurotypical may or may not agonize over the discrepancy, but they will notice it, especially when the trash starts building up.

Narcissistic personality disorder does not, and usually fails to acknowledge the contradiction, preferring to bend reality to suit the fantasy.

To be clear, I am not offering a diagnosis of NPD for Winter, only the observation that the public behavioral pattern exhibited is inconsistent with known ASD traits. This inconsistency with known ASD traits is what's been bothering me — deeply — with the entire *Age of Scorpius* drama.

Yet another thing that Winter did to make my ASD pattern recognition to start spiraling was his claim of doing 10,000 hours of writing made him an expert in the field of writing. Never mind that this claim has been thoroughly debunked for over a decade. Instead, we're going to do the math (again), and see how it holds up against the other mathematically suspect claims Winter has made.

What does 10,000 hours of work actually mean?

- 40 hours/week → 2080 hours/year
- 10,000 ÷ 2080 ≈ 4.8 years

And that assumes:

- no work
- no school
- no social life
- no burnout
- no executive dysfunction

- perfect focus and task-switching

Yet Winter simultaneously claimed:

- full-time writing
- full-time editoral meetings
- team leadership
- social media life
- travel
- environmental activism
- production management
- personal challenges
- and ASD

Alright, let's assume Winter actually had some sort of social life or mental health crises that set him back, and dial that down to 20 hours a week. That's approximately 2.8 hours per day for each full week. Doable, reasonable even.

But is it reasonable after factoring in all the other issues Winter would face for time management, especially when time management is an issue many ASDs struggle with?

Conclusion: Winter's "expert" numbers are inflationary, just like the claims of being on the phone with his editor for three hours and holding multi-hour daily meetings with his team. The "expert" numbers are hallucinatory, in the way the piles of garbage generated by pallets of books were not.

Winter's emotional manipulation has been another hot button issue, and many commentators have focused on Winter's extreme emotional investment. Investment along the lines of "This book is my life. If this book doesn't do well, I die," and trying to pin the success or failure of the book on readers and commentators, implying they would responsible for his continued existence. Winter has been accused of having a history of what is called pity marketing, or emotional blackmail.

Are ASDs capable of emotional blackmail and manipulation? Yes. However, it is often reactive and impulsive. To engage in the sort of extensive emotional manipulation over a period of weeks, months, and even years, as Winter has been alleged to have done, would require an axis of emotional energy that most ASDs to not have. To maintain that level, an ASD would need to be keyed into the emotional responses of the target, and continuously mask their manipulation. This is exhausting for an ASD to maintain for long periods.

Winter's recorded behavior patterns require emotional energy, narrative consistency, and prolonged social manipulation that do not consistently align with known ASD limits.

Was I emotionally manipulated by Winter? Yes. Like most ASDs, I missed the subtext, and read only the surface level distress. And I believe — and still do — that Winter's immediate distress in the first week after his book release was legitimate, albeit expressed incorrectly. After all, when you become a lightning rod for controversy, you are going to have feelings about it.

However, once he moved to attacking another indie author, and pivoting to defensive claims, my view of him fractured. Even as of this moment, I still see other ASD creatives and commentators walking right into Winter's buzzsaw.

Winter went quiet for a few weeks, apparently having picked up and fled the United States for Finland citing, among his reasons, the unstable political climate. Winter has not provided proof that he is in Finland as far as I know. Finland is known to have the toughest immigration and asylum laws of any EU nation and attempting to claim persecution without burden of proof isn't going to fly. If Winter is in Finland, good luck having that 90 day visa renewed. And if Winter is not in Finland, than this is another attempt at emotional manipulation and playing for audience sympathy.

But then, Winter resurfaced, and Booktuber Book Lover Laura had much to say about the essay that Winter wrote to explain his abrupt departure. Go on, have a look, because Laura reads the full thing.

“The forest is on fire and therefore I am on fire,” is not a typical metaphor ASDs reach for. It’s theatrical, and self-mythologizing., like a mythopoetic trauma-sacralization ritual.

On the other hand, Winter has actually read his own book, and concluded that it’s … not great. That’s a good place to start.

I chose to come forward with my observations after watching Dov James’ video at his baldbookgeek channel. He too, noticed the pattern, although, for his own reasons, was much more circumspect about describing it.

Building off of what Dov James has said, it is possible that Winter is ASD as he claims to be. ASD can exist in co-morbidity with other issues, such as bipolar disorder, histronic personality disorder, anti-social personality disorder, and chronic depression. Co-morbidity with other neurotypes and personality disorders is actually not uncommon for autism.

Winter’s ASD signal-to-noise ratio is obscured by the non-ASD-like behavior he is exhibiting. It’s possible it’s there, just heavily masked. It’s also possible he was misdiagnosed as a child by a pediatrician (who are not qualified to make such a diagnosis but many do it anyway), or a therapist who wanted to throw pills and a label at a child rather than do the work. So, it’s possible that Winter could be operating — without malice — under a false diagnosis. I can grant him the

grace of these possibilities, not having enough information to judge otherwise.

Granting Winter that grace, however, does not excuse harm — however accidental or unintended — his claim of ASD is causing ASDs at large.

Yeah, I'm going there.

I have repeatedly seen autism used as a shield to excuse poorly-socialized or bad behavior. These individuals engage in objectively crass or even cruel behavior. Booktubers, TikTok, Twitch streamers, etc.

It's not an unknown or unheard of phenomenon.

They are blunt without awareness, but not because of sensory or processing differences. They lack empathy, but only in the selfish sense, not the neurological one.

They refuse social nuance, not because it's hard — but because they've learned that ignoring it gets them power.

And when called out on it? "Nah, bro, you can't criticize me. I'm neurodivergent."

So they end up looking like they're autistic because they:

- Blurt out socially inappropriate takes.
- Ignore tone, context, and emotional impact.
- Fixate on their interpretation of "truth" over mutual understanding.

But they're not navigating overload or communication deficits. They're just assholes.

Winter's behavior muddies the boundaries between autistic and asshole behavior, causing harm to the ASD/neurodivergent community by making allistics associate ASD/ND behavior with asshole behavior.

Autistic internal monologue while socializing: *Was that too harsh? Maybe I wasn't clear? If I say it clearly will I hurt their feelings? Oh no, they're making that face. What does that face mean? Oh shit oh shit oh shit. I should say something. Oh god, I hope I get this right.*

Asshole internal monologue while socializing: *I'm sorry I got caught.*

Assholes who claim ASD for engaging in bad behavior:

- Are insulting to actual autistic people who work hard to navigate complex social spaces with grace.

- Dodging accountability for their own conscious and willful actions.
- And ironically, perpetuating a form of ableism. They're using ASD as a "get out of social consequence free" card.

Asshole behavior that uses ASD as a shield reinforces the stereotype that autistic people are selfish, callous, manipulative, irresponsible, and socially dangerous.

Winter, for better or worse, falls into that category. Possibly through no fault of his own, but also possibly have been consciously chosen. The publicly available data is insufficient. But Winter's behavior reinforces those negative ASD stereotypes.

Can autistics be assholes? Oh hell yeah, we can. However, being an asshole for long, extended periods of time is also emotionally draining and exhausting, and ultimately conflicts with the internal ASD trait of consistent honesty. The autistic neurotype is not normally engineered to engage in long-term manipulative asshole behavior without consequence or executive function misfires. Not saying it can't happen, especially if ASD is comorbid with other conditions and disorders. But executive dysfunction and the resulting burnout is still a hard wall.

There is life after TikTok, trust me

Still confused? Here's a cheat sheet.

Autistic or Asshole?: A Field Guide

Category	ASD Behavior	Asshole Behavior
Intent	Sincere, often trying to connect or understand others, even if clumsily	Self-centered, dismissive, or confrontational for personal gain or amusement
Bluntness	Comes from difficulty reading or applying social nuance or tone	Weaponized as a tool to provoke, insult, or assert dominance
Rule-following	High: Often respects rules too much, sometimes rigidly	Low: Disregards rules when inconvenient, then cries foul when challenged
Accountability	May struggle with social correction but improves when trusted frameworks are applied	Deflects, justifies, or blames others; often uses "I'm just being honest" as a shield
Empathy	May have cognitive empathy challenges, but emotional empathy is present and deep	Lacks emotional empathy; views others as tools, obstacles, or

		audiences for performances
Social Awareness	May misread cues or miss sarcasm due to neurological processing differences	Reads the room just fine but ignores social signals to get a reaction
Tone policing	Often confused by tone rather than wielding it as a weapon	Uses tone to manipulate, shame, or provoke others
Boundary respect	May not understand implied boundaries, but will respect explicit ones when explained or obvious	Ignores or pushes boundaries deliberately for power, dominance, or disruption
Fixation/focus	Deep, sincere interest in topics or routines and may display obsessive behavior towards a special interest	Obsessive only when it fuels personal ego or interpersonal conflict
Online behavior	May overshare or infodump due to regulation challenges, may be unintentionally blunt in text only communication, possible flat effect	Seeks clout, attention, or drama through hot takes and quote-tweet attacks, melodramatic and theatrical
Growth & Change	Can learn and adapt when given support and clarity	Resistant to growth; views change as defeat or a loss of status
Use of “neurodivergence”	Often doesn’t bring it up unless relevant to access or to support a position	Claims ND status selectively to avoid criticism or win arguments

This was much longer than I expected.

Anyhow, of tangental relevance, during the course of writing this essay I found myself annoyed at the amount of stock photos of “autistic kid wearing headphones” whenever I searched for autism-relevant images. I did not get it. It just made no sense to me.

Then I bought the Soundcore Space One Pros headphones on a Black Friday sale. Oh my god, I never knew it could make such a difference. No, I’m not

being paid to say that. It's just … a fucking game-changing revelation.

As usual, this essay is under Creative Commons License. Do what thou wilt, but don't forget to cite.

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28 November 2025: I have found Winter's High Disturbance essay, and uploaded it to internet.ph for archival preservation in the event of deletion or alteration. Good news, now that I've had a good look at it (I process text better than hearing the audio) … uh.

There is a LOT to unpack here. I'll get into that when I can.

Next: Where is the Dog?

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